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ABSTRACT

The introduction of mentoring approaches into local career guidance strategies could represent an important method of helping disengaged young people achieve a new sense of direction. The aim of Britain's Mentoring Action Project (MAP) initiative has been to create the opportunity to explore the potential for one-to-one mentoring in career guidance for disengaged young people. Pivotal to an understanding of the role of mentoring in career guidance is an acknowledgment that significant numbers of disengaged young people may not be able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them without skilled support in effecting the necessary attitudinal and behavioral changes. MAP has highlighted conditions necessary for career guidance mentoring to succeed: agape, holism, advocacy and feedback, graded steps, opportunities for mentors to facilitate and support young people's development and progression, partnerships with other local agencies, integration into existing provision, and beneficiary finance. Styles of mentoring adopted by career guidance mentors include the following: good parent, learning facilitator, career guidance provider, and social worker. Mentors should have the abilities to act as positive role models, influence client behavior and attitudes positively, and enhance self-image. The six key stages of the mentoring process are as follows: mentoring for survival, to improve life and social skills, to improve self-awareness, to improve self-image, for career exploration, and for career management. (YLB)

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ED 419 177

Career Guidance Mentoring for Disengaged Young People

The European Social Fund is one of three Structural Funds set up to help European Union Member-States combat unemployment and regenerate areas of industrial or rural decline and areas lagging behind in economic development.

The Institute of Careers Guidance is the UK's largest professional body representing careers guidance practitioners and those interested in careers guidance. It defines and promotes the ethics, principles and practice of high quality careers guidance to all individuals as their right.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation initiated and supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment. CRAC has sponsored NICEC since 1975.

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An increasing number of agencies are recognising the value of individual mentoring as a means of extending help and support to disengaged young people. Careers services are being encouraged by the Government to prioritise guidance work with disengaged target groups, and to introduce policies which minimise the numbers of young people who drop out of education and training. The introduction of mentoring approaches into local career guidance strategies could represent an important method of helping disengaged young people to achieve a new sense of direction.

This Briefing examines:

- the nature and activities of career guidance mentoring;
- the conditions which contribute to successful mentoring strategies;
- the skills, qualities and functions of the effective mentor;
- the relationships between non-formal guidance and formal careers education and guidance programmes;
- key development issues.

The Briefing is based on the Institute of Careers Guidance Mentoring Action Project, funded under the European Commission's Youthstart Programme. It has been written by Geoff Ford of NICEC (the project evaluator).

MENTORING ACTION PROJECT

The MAP (Mentoring Action Project) initiative – a partnership of 20 careers service companies in the UK and co-ordinated by the Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) – was funded within the Youthstart strand of the European Social Fund's Employment Community Initiative 1995-97.

MAP's main aim was to create the opportunity to explore the potential for one-to-one mentoring in career guidance for disengaged young people. In 1998-99 ICG is organising a "second-stage" Youthstart initiative – Stepping Stones – which examines the role of group work within non-formal career guidance, building on the experience of one-to-one mentoring developed by careers services within MAP.

The 20 MAP partners provided varying levels of mentoring support, principally to disengaged young people who had left school, but with some provision for final-year school pupils identified as "at risk". Most MAP projects specifically targeted identifiable groups of disengaged young people, including those who are homeless or periodically homeless, leaving care, ex-offenders, on drugs, lone parents, or going through personal crises (normally family-related). Many of the young people concerned had multiple problems, could therefore be classified under more than one target group, and were known to a number of local agencies.

Factors concerning the main MAP clientele which have a key bearing on the nature and objectives of individual mentoring relationships include the following:

- A high percentage of mentees – in some areas over 50% – were care leavers.
- The vast majority came from broken or unstable home backgrounds.
- Many of the client group lacked access to a caring adult or role-model to help them acquire mature independence.
- Most had very low levels of self-confidence, and negative self-esteem.
- Considerable – and sometimes acute – poverty was a common problem, making progression from a state of disaffection difficult without access to additional funding.
- Many were not in a situation to act on careers advice until they had identified strategies to overcome – or begin to overcome – personal problems hampering progression, and had attained some level of personal security.
- There could be a mismatch between the client's own learning style (e.g. practical, active, project-based) and the dominant learning style of the previous – or present – learning organisation (e.g. academic, emphasis on listening and reading).
- Many had poor or no qualifications (a small number were comparatively well qualified, but – for a variety of reasons – had dropped out of continuing education).
- Field evidence from MAP indicates there is no necessary correlation between disaffection and lack of intelligence or potential. Some of the disengaged young people were evidently highly intelligent, with their abilities concentrated on daily survival. Many of the young people wanted skills and qualifications, but felt unsupported by the system in their desire to attain them.

CAREER GUIDANCE MENTORING

DEFINITION

Mentors are "people who, through their action and work, help others to achieve their potential" (Shea, G.F.: *Mentoring: a Guide to the Basics*, London: Kogan Page, 1992). This definition embraces the concept of mentoring as a specific set of abilities and qualities which complement and enhance the quality and effectiveness of other skills (e.g. career guidance, teaching, youth work).

MAP: MENTORING OBJECTIVES

The adoption of a client-focused and active approach to mentoring was central to ICG's vision for MAP. The project provided space to explore and develop a range of non-formal and holistic guidance approaches and models to help disengaged and disadvantaged young people to: gain an understanding of their own potential; learn how to "engage" successfully with the wider community (including appropriate behaviour); and progress into more formal opportunities – where necessary through "phased steps".

MAP's success was seen as dependent on the ability of career guidance mentors to effect changes in client attitudes, and help them to develop the skills to progress. Once clients have acquired the necessary attitudes and skills (including lifeskills), they are then better placed to act on the information (on self and opportunities) made available through appropriate career guidance methods, including approaches tailored for non-formal usage. This requires career guidance mentors to develop additional skills to enable them to:

- enter the client's frame of reference;
- help clients to understand their potential to change;
- provide interactive feedback on change;
- open doors (through advocacy and negotiation), and cross thresholds with clients in ways which support rather than disempower them (Barham, L.: MAP paper, 1995).

Pivotal to an understanding of the role of mentoring in career guidance is an acknowledgement that significant numbers of disengaged young people may not be able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them (career guidance, learning, work) without skilled support in effecting the necessary attitudinal and behavioural changes. In practice, MAP has shown that the more effective mentors assume some functions which are analogous to the "good parent". The process is inevitably resource-intensive, even where the role can be shared with other agencies.

MAP ACHIEVEMENTS

Although there are difficulties in distinguishing the impact of mentoring from other factors, the evidence available from MAP – including feedback from the young clients themselves – indicates that high-quality mentoring can help to free many young people from "disaffection". Although it is misleading to assess the success of guidance work with disengaged young people solely in terms of "hard outcomes", the 1997 statistics show that 55% of MAP clients nationally entered education, training or work (691 from a total of 1,266 mentees).

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

MAP has highlighted a number of conditions necessary for career guidance mentoring to succeed.

AGAPE

External evaluation shows that successful mentors attain high standards in terms of client-centredness, depth of empathy and understanding, and knowledge of their clients. The mentors concerned demonstrate a genuine, client-centred concern and caring for each individual client, which is warm, dispassionate, spontaneous, and non-judgmental, and with a readiness to go an 'additional mile' beyond the normal call of duty (*Agape* is a Greek word meaning genuine charity and selflessness of service.)

The mentoring is entirely professional, and takes place against a well-thought-through framework of professional aims, objectives, values and ethics which forms a continuing backcloth for all mentor-client interactions, and is definable at each stage of the mentoring process. The mentoring relationship is dynamic and:

- leads to action and service on behalf of the client;
- inspires the client to take action on her/his own behalf for reasons which may include the mentor acting as role model (i.e. as a 'good parent').

Feedback from clients shows that the qualities involved in high-quality mentoring are clearly perceived by the young people themselves; and are key factors in helping them to progress from disaffection and disengagement, and to begin to establish a clearer sense of purpose. Conversely, young people are quick to discern the absence of these qualities in agencies and staff, particularly where they may be encountering intolerance and stereotyping.

HOLISM

Holism is the treatment of any subject as a totally integrated system. Within guidance for disengaged young people, where the career predicament of the individual and her/his social context are normally interdependent, a holistic approach entails giving full consideration to those social and personal issues which are impeding progression. Unless these issues are firstly addressed, the young person may be unable to take advantage of career guidance and the actions agreed.

For example, in the case of young lone parents, this means giving consideration to employment and education issues and objectives, alongside a range of related factors which may include: childcare; parental responsibilities, including the instinctive desire to put the needs of the child first; poor relationships with home; financial difficulties, including the 'benefits trap'; health; accommodation; the implications of broken education; and (possibly) coping constructively with a developing but still submerged awareness of unfulfilled abilities which may necessitate longer-term action planning; in addition to any immediate financial pressures to secure part-time employment.

However, evaluation indicates that the balance between holistic and more narrowly-focused career guidance can prove a delicate one. Care is needed to ensure that holistic approaches towards guidance do not separate mentors from the mainstream, or weaken the career-oriented element of guidance (which remains the distinctive purpose of careers services' contribution to work with disengaged young people). In particular, initial assessment may be insufficiently detailed or missed out altogether, so that disengaged client groups have inadequate opportunities to explore their potential.

ADVOCACY AND FEEDBACK

MAP has helped to reinforce the importance of advocacy as a key career guidance activity in work with disengaged young people. Advocacy activity has included:

- the negotiation of interviews with opportunity providers;
- acting as a referee and – where appropriate – as a guarantor of the client's changed behaviour and/or circumstances;
- providing a fall-back for the opportunity provider if the client (or the provider) encounters difficulties during the placement.

Where appropriate, mentors have also accompanied young people to statutory agencies and opportunity providers (e.g. when the client is having difficulty in making a case, understanding the regulations, or mustering the necessary self-confidence to 'cross the threshold').

An important aspect of the 'hand-holding' role is to help young people to acquire the confidence and skill to act independently, and to develop freedom from – not dependence on – the mentor. Successful advocacy necessitates mentors:

- combining the functions of role model, coach, tutor and good parent to help young people to acquire the necessary behavioural and inter-personal skills to cope effectively alone;
- opening doors of opportunity for clients which previously appeared shut.

In effect, significant numbers of mentors have been functioning as *key workers* to represent and support individual young people, who often have no apparent access to alternative support, to a number of local organisations and agencies.

The richness of experience that mentors develop on the nature and causes of disaffection means that they are strongly positioned to provide local policy-makers with feedback on the needs of disengaged and disadvantaged groups, and advice on possible initiatives to overcome disaffection. Importantly, the evidence of MAP indicates that mentors are also able to help in providing young people with the confidence and opportunity to advocate on their own behalf.

GRADED STEPS

Young people firstly need to know that they are capable of positive achievement, in order to give them the confidence necessary to progress into more formal situations. Experience shows that a primary role of career guidance mentors is to:

- set tasks and 'small-step' objectives;
- explore with the client how best to approach the tasks and achieve the objectives;
- review progress at a slightly later date (possibly the following week).

An example of a task might be making a phone call (e.g. to the Benefits Agency, to a hostel to arrange accommodation, or to a training provider). The mentor may work through the stages of the phone call with the young person, and then rehearse possible scenarios, including preparing responses to the answers anticipated from the agency concerned. Some mentors have scripted the first part of telephone calls for their young clients, and may subsequently be present to watch and advise on performance.

MAP has prompted a number of services to consider how mentors could be more closely involved in recording and assessing young people's developing achievements. Methods might include use of profile certificates, the Progress File, entry-level qualifications, youth awards (e.g. ASDAN and Youth Clubs UK), and QCA key skills. ICG's Stepping Stones initiative takes forward the concept of careers services' involvement in assessment and accreditation, including use of group work.

Coping with homelessness, bringing up a child as a young lone mother, or developing the willpower to break a drugs habit, are examples of powerful challenges which are also likely to necessitate a series of graded steps, and which require – and potentially develop – a multiplicity of skills. However, these are clearly areas where the support of other specialist agencies is necessary, and serve to reinforce the importance of strong local-partnership working (see below).

Opportunities

Mentors need access to a range of local opportunities to facilitate and support young people's development and progression. These include: group work, residential experience, youth awards, work experience, 'taster' arrangements with learning providers, short placements and visits, and supportive 'gateways' courses in further education. Initiatives which directly involve young people as active participants can prove particularly effective in helping mentees to develop in self-confidence and purpose, and appreciate their own potential and ability to succeed. Feedback from all parties, including young people themselves, indicates that initiatives of this type can prove especially effective in breaking disaffection.

Partnership

Successful career guidance mentoring is dependent on the strength of the partnerships created with other local agencies. Effective partnerships are essential for reasons which include:

- ease of referral (e.g. to agencies specialising in problems such as homelessness or drug abuse);
- increased access to opportunities (e.g. youth services, Prince's Trust, further education);
- influencing the infrastructure of provision (through combined action and feedback, including partnership bids for funds – evidence indicates that those careers services most able to help disengaged young people are also those most successful in levering targeted finance);
- providing bases for outreach work (disaffection from statutory agencies frequently includes disaffection from careers-centre premises until bridges are established);
- ensuring disengaged young people are referred back to the Careers Service (careers services with strong tracking procedures also tend to be at the centre of strong local networks).

Integration

Careers services have differed in the extent to which MAP has been integrated into existing provision. Generally, a wider range of good practice is found in those services which have incorporated MAP into existing structures, and – importantly – where mentors can receive higher levels of support. Where mentoring provision is not integrated, the mentors (who necessarily work largely outside the office in outreach situations) tend to become isolated; and services become overly reliant on the unsupported commitment, dedication and determination of the staff concerned.

Beneficiary finance

MAP has helped to identify the extent to which disengagement can be attributable to poverty, or to the absence of the skills and resources necessary for basic survival. For example, day-to-day budgeting can present real difficulties for some young people, including those leaving care and entering independent accommodation, and teenage mothers. Barriers to engagement in the formal sector regularly encountered by mentors and directly attributable to youth poverty, include difficulties in meeting the costs of: travel (e.g. to statutory agencies including careers offices, and for selection interviews); self-presentation (clothing, hairdressing, hygiene); full-time study (especially where discretionary awards are not available); and childcare.

The European budget for MAP has included an element for beneficiary payments (also included in Stepping Stones). The finance can be used at the discretion of mentors to facilitate the guidance process, and to help – in a variety of ways – to overcome individual barriers impeding progression. The arrangement has enabled mentors to respond instantaneously to real need; to open small but often vital doors of opportunity to young people; and to ensure that young people have the resources to implement recommended actions. Although there are resource issues here for organisations, mentors report that some of the steps required to enable individuals to progress would have proved insuperable without access to the finance.

QUALITIES OF THE EFFECTIVE MENTOR

STYLES OF MENTORING

Styles of mentoring adopted by career guidance mentors include:

- *Good parent* – support, caring, interest, concern, explanations, helping to develop confidence and self-esteem.
- *Learning facilitator* – setting of short steps, checking up on understanding and action, helping clients to acquire and practise career management skills (self-knowledge, information, taking action, coping with transitions).
- *Career guidance provider* – direct provider of careers information and advice, including 'first aid'.
- *Social worker* – liaison with statutory and voluntary services, informed referral, advocate and representative for the young person to relevant agencies, negotiator, key worker.

In practice, the styles inter-relate and overlap. Mentors who are able to adapt – and move easily between – styles in response to the needs of individual clients are likely to be better equipped to adopt a holistic approach towards each client, which is also practical in its outcomes.

MENTOR AS ROLE MODEL

Good mentors act as role models. This function can underlie all aspect of their work as observed by young people. For much of the time, the function of the mentor as role model may lie largely in the unconscious of both mentors and mentees, but it can have profound implications for the influence mentors ultimately have on their young clients.

The reality of the function therefore needs to be openly recognised and understood by mentors, including its implications for:

- the conduct of all mentor-mentee interactions;
- mentors' value-systems, and the ways in which mentors communicate, use and reveal their own value systems during relationships with their young clients;
- the demeanour of the mentor, e.g. in terms of courtesy, empathy, respect, and overall client-centredness;
- the professional conduct of the mentor, including reliability, response times, the honouring of promises, and confidentiality.

SKILLS OF MENTORING – AND THEIR IMPACT

During the MAP evaluation the feedback from young people on their mentors, and on mentoring as a career guidance approach, was generally highly positive. The directness of the feedback received from the main consumers also illustrated the value of ensuring that young people are always consulted during local and national evaluations of career guidance provision for disengaged and disadvantaged groups. However, it is necessary to view young people's feedback in context, and in relation to other available evidence.

During the MAP evaluation, young people described the reasons for their mentors' effectiveness in some detail. The observations of one mentee – who regarded her mentor highly – is used below to help in classifying key skills and qualities necessary for effective mentoring.

A young client's observations on her mentor; corresponding mentoring skills and qualities

'K understands and is always ready to help.'
Empathy; highly-developed listening and inter-personal skills; the ability to enter the client's frame of reference; client-centredness; the ability to convey warmth, regard and acceptance; non-judgmental approach; openness and availability; prompt response times; reliability.

'If it wasn't for K, we wouldn't know who to turn to.'
Ability to command trust and respect; personal values system regarded highly by young people; readiness to stand alongside clients and share their burdens.

'K knows a lot about the area and what's available.'
High-quality professional career guidance skills, including front-line (information, advice, signposting, referral) networking abilities; knowledge of other agencies.

'K always keeps her promises, and does what she says she will do.'
Reliability; trust; prompt response times (also implied: efficient record-keeping and administrative skills; confidentiality).

'The Tuesday meetings are always good, and give us hope for the future.'
High-quality group-work skills; organisational abilities; positive encouragement; sense of humour; emphasis on the importance of developing young people's self-esteem.

'K takes us out to places, and comes with us when we need support.'
Networking; organisational abilities; coach and learning facilitator; trust; empathy; reliability; entry into the client's frame of reference; readiness to stand alongside the client, and provide both practical and emotional support; advocacy and negotiation skills.

'K always encourages us, and makes us feel better about ourselves.'
Warmth; empathy; genuineness; respect for the client; positive encouragement; continuing emphasis on the importance of developing young people's self-esteem.

'I'd like to be like K one day.'
Respect; trust; role model; personal values system regarded highly by young people.

There are implications here both for selection and for training. Mentors should already have the necessary abilities to act as positive role models, and to influence client behaviour and attitudes positively through personal interaction with them. It is also necessary that they should have the capacity to lift the self-image of young people, and help them begin to feel positive about themselves and their own ability to succeed.

Training will need to focus on:

- enhancing qualities which are inherent;
- helping mentors to develop in self-awareness so that they become more adept in assessing their own effect and impact on clients, and in improving and evaluating their personal mentoring skills and performance;
- extending the mentor's repertoire of skills and approaches (including non-formal career guidance techniques).

MENTORING AND CEG

Career guidance mentors working with the 16-plus age-group are basically concerned with delivering individually-tailored careers education and guidance (CEG) programmes to individuals and groups of young people: in non-formal situations; through non-formal delivery mechanisms; at a later stage than the majority of young people in their age-group; often on a longitudinal basis; as the opportunities present themselves; and frequently with an accompanying need for intensive personal support.

This applies even where career guidance mentors may be experiencing difficulty in structuring the mentoring process coherently, because of the need to respond flexibly to individual needs and circumstances as they arise. The observation suggests that mentors can operate within more structured – although flexibly applied – operational frameworks firmly rooted in mainstream career guidance methodology and practice. These frameworks can have clearly-defined objectives and outcomes.

The main areas of mentors' client-focused guidance activity outlined below closely parallel the learning outcomes of CEG (self awareness; opportunity awareness; decision learning; transition learning).

The activities of career guidance mentors
(Note: the six key stages of the mentoring process inevitably overlap, and not all clients will need to experience each stage.)

Stage 1 – *mentoring for survival*
Includes: often intensive involvement by the mentor in helping the client to cope with basic needs, including accommodation, benefits, budgeting, health, food, family relationships; supporting the client in negotiation with other agencies.

Stage 2 – *mentoring to improve life and social skills*
Includes: time-keeping; appearance; self-presentation; hygiene; communication; personal relationships; coping strategies, including strategies to overcome barriers impeding progress; mini-action plans and phased steps.

Stage 3 – *mentoring to improve self-awareness*
Includes: reflecting on and learning from past behaviour; identifying the consequences of past behaviour on self and others; determining more positive ways of behaving; relating past and future behaviour to the expectations of others, including employers and learning providers.

Stage 4 – *mentoring to improve self-image*
Includes: helping the client to recognise positive achievements; showing the client positive regard; helping to identify and/or provide progressive opportunities in which the client can succeed; celebrating and recording success; assessing and accrediting competence in non-formal situations; enabling the client to begin the process of gaining formal qualifications.

Stage 5 – *mentoring for career exploration*
Includes: initial and continuing assessment; career guidance; use of computer- assisted guidance and psychometric tests; identification of opportunities; visits; sampling learning opportunities; short work-experience placements; encouragement of visits to careers office.

Stage 6 – *mentoring for career management*
Includes: support in decision-making; action plans; implementing action plans; on-going support and follow-up, gradually phased so that the initiatrve begins to pass to the client.

KEY ISSUES

- The further exploration of methods to extend and adapt mainstream career guidance methodology for non-formal usage, and for target groups who may not readily have access. This includes initial assessment techniques (interests, skills, abilities, potential).
- The extension of methods to record and celebrate young people's non-formal achievements.
- The assessment and accreditation of non-formal achievements – including progress in achieving 'graded steps' – against formally-recognised qualifications (especially at foundation and entry level) to help create additional 'pathways of learning' from non-formal situations into mainstream provision.
- Further strengthening of local networks and development of partnerships – in particular, to extend the range of opportunities available locally which involve young people as active participants.
- The supply and utilisation of local opportunities for work experience, and for sampling, tasters, and short placements in learning and employment.
- The dissemination of front-line guidance skills to community-agency staff throughout local networks, so extending the availability of guidance-oriented mentoring, front-line guidance provision, and informed referral.
- Resource issues – effective work with disengaged young people is demonstrably resource-intensive.

At local level, a balance of locally-networked provision is called for, within which disengaged young people are enabled to progress from one-to-one support into group situations, and thence into formal opportunities, with non-formal achievements recorded and/or assessed and accredited en route.

A recurring message throughout the MAP initiative, and central to future developments to assist disengaged young people, is that the individual skills and commitment of the key workers – including mentors – are fundamental in helping to overcome disaffection.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The findings summarised here are explored in greater detail in:

Ford, G.: *Career Guidance Mentoring for Disengaged Young People*. Stourbridge: Institute of Careers Guidance, 1998.

The report contains detailed information on the implementation of MAP in each careers service and local partnership. It also relates career guidance mentoring to other initiatives.

Copies of the report and further information are available from the Institute of Careers Guidance (27a Lower High Street, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 1TA, tel. 01384-376464, fax. 01384-440830). Additional copies of this Briefing are obtainable from ICG on receipt of an A4 stamped (31p for one or two copies, 38p for up to four copies, 45p for up to six copies) and addressed envelope. Please telephone or send a fax regarding bulk orders.

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